

Give in to Guilty Pleasures

How to survive a Russian winter? Cave in.

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Pixabay

Sometimes all your strategies to stay fit, keep your spirits up, and be active all winter just don't work. It's really cold out. There was six minutes of sunshine in December. Your electric bill is skyrocketing and your apartment is still too dark in the mornings. You hate your job, your significant other, Moscow, your life.

We understand. Some call this SAD (seasonal affective disorder). We call it: February in Moscow.

Our antidote? Give in to it. For an afternoon, a night, or even a weekend, cave in to guilty pleasures. If it makes you smile – do it.

Binge-Watch Serials

Couch, popcorn, remote

Thanks to Netflix and stores specializing in DVDs, you no longer have to beg your relatives for series spoilers or dabble in illegal downloads on VPN servers. Netflix (netflix.com/ru) has monthly plans from about eight to 12 euros and enough series to get you through to spring. If you like the old-fashioned disc method, check out Transilvania (transilvania.ru), Dom Knigi (mdk-arbat.ru), Mir Kino (vk.com/mirkinomsk), Dom Kultury (domkultury.su) or Ozon.ru. Beware of mislabeled covers that promise a soundtrack in the original language but deliver Russian dubbing. In stores ask the salesclerk to open it up and check it before you hand over your cash. And then: a weekend on the couch in torn sweatpants and the biggest bowls of popcorn and chips your kitchen can provide.

Have a Man Day

Renewal at a bespoke barbers

Men, if you are not feeling your best, how about a day at the barbers? In a place that looks like an exclusive men's club, with professionals who have all gotten their training in London? Put yourself in competent hands at GB Barbers. You can have the classic haircut and shave, but consider adding on a "masculine" manicure and pedicure. If that's not enough, sign up for a facial, massage or paraffin therapy for your winter-dried hands and legs. In Russian and English.

10 Ulitsa Vozdvizhenka (Voentorg, entrance from Bolshoi Kislovsky Pereulok). Metro Arbatskaya, Biblioteka Lenina. +7 495 797 2052. jpbarbers.ru/eng.

Spa Day

Relax, refresh, rehydrate

The best cure for the dry and irritated skin, lackluster hair, and low-energy of winter is a day at a spa. Moscow is filled with great spas, so you may already have your favorite. If not, try the Mandara Spa at the Lotte Hotel, where East meets West in the most relaxing way. Various types of massage, facials, peels and scrubs, and oxygen treatments make you feel human again. Relax in the Jacuzzi, silk bath, hammam and sauna before and after treatments.

8 Novinsky Bulvar, Bldg. 2. Metro Smolenskaya. +7 495 745 1000. mandaraspa.com/spa/Russia-Lotte-Hotel-Moscow

Ice Cream Night

Ultimate comfort food

Classic Russian ice cream is about as good as ice cream gets. The best of it is made with just three main ingredients: heavy cream, egg yolks and sugar. No palm oil or even water are added. The next time you've had a really hard week and the nearest public holiday is in two months, consider a splurge on the ultimate Russian comfort food, i.e., ice cream. After serious and extensive consumer testing, we vote for Чистая линия vanilla (пломбир), produced by a small Moscow company and sold in retro-designed paper sacks. Top with home-made jam, chopped nuts and bits of chocolate, cookies or fruit. Russian friends call it the "taste of childhood." We call it: worth the calories.

Happy Hour

Hot cocktails

When we say “hot cocktails,” we really mean “hot” — mulled wine, Irish coffee, sbiten (a hot Russian drink made with honey and spices) or a mug of hot, spicy, boozy cranberry cocktail. VDNKh Park (vdnh.ru) is a great place for mulled wine as a break from skating or strolling. Grab one and keep warm on the ice. Strelka has a whole menu of hot drinks, but our favorite is Hot Gold made with orange juice, amaretto and cinnamon (strelkainstitute.com/en/bar/?v=bar). Another place that never fails to please is Scandinavia (scandinavia.ru), where the bar staff really knows how to warm up body and soul. If you don’t feel up for one of their trademark hot cocktails, try their excellent mulled wine. If it’s too cold to venture out, master do-it-yourself mulled wine. Start by ordering in some dry red wine, then add slices of orange, cinnamon sticks, cloves and ginger, bring almost to a boil and then flavor with a bit of honey. It may still be cold outside, but you’ll be glowing within.

Tanning Salon

Grab your sunglasses

When health organizations warn about the dangers of sun damage, they are talking about places that actually have sunlight. In Moscow during the winter, sunlight is a memory, not a health risk. You can pop some vitamin D, but 10 minutes of controlled artificial sunlight will perk you up and rid you of that pasty white winter look. But do it right. Be sure to wear goggles and use skin protection. Check to see that the tanning bed is clean. Don’t go more than once or twice a month, and don’t beg the technician to let you stay in longer than recommended. And go to the highest-end spa or tanning salon you can afford.

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